



## Planning Update

PLANNING UPDATE #2

JULY 1998

### GREETINGS!

This is the second in a series of updates from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to keep you informed about planning for the proposed North Delta National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in the northern Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. Landowners in the study area, government agencies, private organizations, and others who express interest will routinely be receiving these planning updates.

This update presents the issues, concerns, and questions raised by the public and recorded during the March 4th public open house at Davis, as well as written comments received during the extended comment period. Based on this feedback, the Service is re-evaluating the scope of the proposed project. We will announce future opportunities for you to participate in the planning process through planning updates and meeting announcement flyers.

### RESULTS OF FIRST OPEN HOUSE

We would like to thank those who attended the March 4th public open house. We have a better understanding of and appreciation for your concerns; we hope you have a better understanding of our proposal and the planning process. Public reactions varied from full support for the proposed refuge to concern about how a refuge would affect landowners and agricultural operations in this part of the Delta. Some of these concerns were discussed at the open house; others were addressed following the open house during personal contacts. Your comments and concerns will be addressed in the Proposed North Delta National Wildlife Refuge Land Protection Plan/Environmental Assessment. Issues identified at the Davis meeting are presented on pages 2 and 3 of this update.

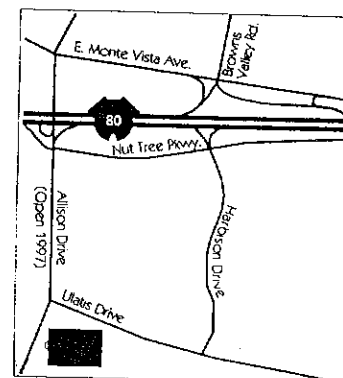
### WHERE ARE WE NOW

The open house and written comments received during the extended comment period helped us to identify a number of issues and concerns. These include: potential impacts to agriculture, levee maintenance, floodwater conveyance, protection and restoration of wetlands, increased fisheries habitat, public use, and landowner rights.

Also, several adjoining landowners have expressed interest in being included within the study area for the proposed refuge. Because the addition of these landowners would change the size and scope of the original proposal, the Service intends to extend the public scoping process. A new map of the expanded study area is attached to this planning update.

### SECOND OPEN HOUSE ANNOUNCEMENT

We have scheduled another open house on July 28, 1998, from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., at the Ulati Community Center in Vacaville. We invite you to attend, ask questions, and share your ideas about the proposed refuge. Your participation is an integral part in the development of this refuge. Below is a map showing the location of the Ulati Community Center at 1000 Ulati Drive, in Vacaville, California.



## ISSUES, CONCERNS, AND COMMENTS FROM MARCH 4th OPEN HOUSE

### GENERAL

At the March 4th open house, the public visited with agency staff at five tables representing the major categories described here and on page 3. Recorders at each table wrote down their comments so they can be addressed in the refuge planning process. Here are the issues, comments, and questions--as they were recorded:

### AGRICULTURE/LAND USE

- The agricultural community wants to be a part of the solution in the Delta not "The Solution".
- The Service should meet with the Delta Protection Committee prior to initiating any detailed planning.
- Look at the historical perspective of the Delta prior to the Deep Water Ship Channel.
- Is the Service required to comply with CEQA as well as NEPA?
- The Service needs to incorporate potential impacts to adjoining land uses (including agriculture) into its environmental analysis and planning.

### FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT

- Surrounding landowners are concerned about increased wave action as a result of islands being flooded. This could lead to increased erosion on their levees if the Service does not adequately maintain levees on Prospect and Liberty Islands.
- The Service needs to consider more wetland restoration and levee removal in the Delta because it will reduce present flood flow problems in the Delta.
- The Service needs to carefully consider how this project would affect flood control at the community of Rio Vista.
- Surrounding landowners are concerned about potential subterranean flows of water between flooded lands and adjacent dry lands.

- The Service needs to show how the restoration of these islands in the Delta will improve flood flows through the Yolo Bypass.

### FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

- Representatives from the Yolo Audubon Society and Yolo Basin Wildlife Foundation support the establishment of this refuge.
- Will the Service establish a safe harbor program to ensure that local farming operations are not affected by increased endangered species presence in this area?
- Will the Service provide mitigation to local farmers for crop depredation caused by increased waterfowl and migratory birds in this area?

### REFUGE MANAGEMENT

- The Service should redesign levees to allow overtopping by flood flows: impacts to surrounding landowners could be reduced if levees were lowered to less than 27 feet above sea level.
- What will the Service do with water presently used for farming of these Islands? Will management of these islands result in diminished flows through this portion of the Delta?
- Do not build any facilities or structures on Little Holland or Liberty Island that would require protection by fortifying levees.
- Vandalism is already an issue for local landowners. Increased public use in the area will only increase vandalism.
- Keep part of Liberty Island in agricultural production. It will help reduce crop depredation caused by increased waterfowl use of the area.
- Allow continued recreation and hunting and fishing in the area once the refuge is established.

## OPEN HOUSE COMMENTS • REFUGE MANAGEMENT • PLANNING SCHEDULE

### *Open house comments continued:*

#### LAND ACQUISITION

- Landowners who remain inside refuge boundaries are concerned about access to their property.
- Some adjacent landowners are supportive of the refuge. Several asked to be included within the study area and identified as willing sellers.
- Some adjacent landowners are concerned that acquisition of land by Service will cause their property values to drop because they will be next to flooded wetlands and not prime agricultural lands.
- Will the Service provide mitigation to the counties for the loss of prime agricultural farmlands as a result of converting farm lands to flooded wetlands?
- The Government should consider establishing agricultural easements to mitigate for the loss of prime agricultural farmlands.

#### WHAT'S NEXT?

A 30-day comment period will start with the July 28th open house. After the comment period closes, we will distribute another Planning Update that presents the comments received. These comments will be considered in the development of the North Delta National Wildlife Refuge Land Protection Plan (LPP)/Environmental Assessment (EA). They will help determine the size of the refuge that will be described and analyzed in the planning documents. The draft LPP will represent the Service's proposed refuge boundary. The EA will analyze the Service's proposed refuge and alternatives refuges boundaries considered. You will have an opportunity to review and provide comment on both the plan and environmental assessment.

#### REFUGE MANAGEMENT

If the refuge is established, the Service is required, by law, to prepare a Comprehensive Conservation Plan for management of the new refuge and provide opportunities for public input during its development. The Comprehensive Conservation Plan describes management goals for the refuge and compatible public uses.

Congress has mandated that, on national wildlife refuges, wildlife management is always the primary land use; however, the Service must consider incorporation of wildlife-dependent recreational activities, such as wildlife observation, photography, interpretation, environmental education, hunting, and fishing, whenever these uses are compatible with the purposes of the refuge. Other public and economic uses may also be considered if they are compatible with refuge purposes.

The Service is committed to providing high-quality, safe, and accessible wildlife-dependent interpretive, recreation, and environmental education opportunities at the refuge within the capabilities of available staff and budget.

#### PROPOSED PLANNING SCHEDULE

<i>Planning Step</i>	<i>Completion Date</i>
1 <sup>st</sup> Public Open House	3/4/98
2nd Public Open House	7/28/98
Draft Land Protection Plan/EA	11/98
Comment period ends on LPP/EA	12/98
Final Land Protection Plan/EA	12/98
Public Notice of Decision	1/99

*\*\*Unforeseen circumstances could cause schedule changes. We will keep you posted.*

## PROJECT BACKGROUND • WILDLIFE HABITAT • WHO TO CONTACT

### PROJECT BACKGROUND

The proposed North Delta NWR is located about 10 miles west of Walnut Grove at the southern end of the Yolo Bypass. The core of the study area includes three islands--Prospect Island, Liberty Island, and Little Holland Tract--which cover approximately 7,800 acres.

The purpose of the proposed refuge is to restore a variety of Delta habitats, including tidally-influenced wetlands, to benefit several fish and wildlife species. Because of their strategic location in the Yolo Bypass, restoration of the three islands will also substantially improve the conveyance of floodwaters through the North Delta.

While the Service is the lead Federal agency for the proposed refuge, the Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation, California Department of Water Resources, and California Department of Fish and Game, are supporting partners on the project.

### DIVERSE HABITATS SUPPORT WILDLIFE

Before the regulation of flows and the channelization of rivers, the Delta was characterized by sluggish river channels, oxbow and floodplain lakes, swamps, and sloughs. Native fish thrived in weedy backwaters and large stretches of open water. The region's dense tules, willows, and cottonwoods supported more than 250 species of birds and mammals. Traditionally, the three islands were farmed, which has left most of the loamy peat soils below sea level. In recent years, the levees surrounding the islands have either been breached or overtopped by water.

Today, a diverse array of habitats lie within the study area: open water, tidal emergent marsh, riparian forest, seasonal wetlands, uplands, and agricultural lands. The Delta supports over 45

species of fish and its tidally-influenced wetlands provide rearing and resting habitat for winter-run Chinook salmon, Delta smelt, and Sacramento splittail. The uplands and agricultural lands provide nesting, resting, and feeding areas for ducks, geese, swans, cranes, other waterbirds, and neotropical songbirds. The proposed refuge would also provide important habitat for seven special status species that occur in the Delta.

### WHO TO CONTACT

If you have questions or would like information, please feel free to call or write us:

#### Information on Proposed North Delta NWR Planning Process

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#### Information on Proposed North Delta NWR Management

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#### Information on Proposed North Delta NWR Land Acquisition

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*\*\*Please call to be placed on our mailing list or to report a change in your mailing address.*

